

TUBERCULOSIS

Tuberculosis (TB) is a bacterial disease that can affect any part of the body but usually attacks the lungs. The number of TB cases reported in the United States has increased every year since 1985. About 10 to 15 million people in the United States are infected with the TB bacterium. They may develop TB disease in the future.

How is TB Spread?

TB is spread when people with TB disease of the lungs or throat cough or sneeze. They expel TB bacteria into the air. Other people become infected when they breathe in air containing these bacteria. People at greatest risk are family members or coworkers who have close daily contact with persons who have the disease. **People do not become infected through handshakes, sitting on toilet seats, or sharing dishes and utensils with someone who has TB.**

People with TB infection do not necessarily have TB disease. They do not feel sick and do not have any symptoms. They are not sick because the bacteria are inactive in their bodies. They cannot spread TB to others. However, they may develop TB disease in the future.

People with TB disease are sick from bacteria that are active in their body. The general symptoms of TB disease

include:

- weakness or fatigue
- weight loss
- loss of appetite
- chills
- fever
- night sweats

The symptoms of TB of the lungs include:

- a bad cough that lasts longer than 2 weeks.
- chest pain.
- coughing up blood.

Other symptoms depend on the part of the body that is affected.

What Is a Tuberculin Skin Test?

The tuberculin skin test is used to find out if a person is infected with the TB bacterium. It does not tell whether a person has TB disease. For the skin test, a small amount of fluid called tuberculin is injected under the skin in the lower part of the arm. Two or three days later, a health care worker looks for a reaction on the arm.

What Does a Positive Reaction Mean?

A positive reaction to the tuberculin skin test usually means that the person has been infected with the TB bacterium. It does not necessarily mean that the person has TB disease. Other tests, such as a chest x-ray and a sample of sputum, are needed to see whether the person has TB disease.

Preventive therapy

Some people who have a TB infection are at increased risk of developing the disease. These people are usually advised to take a drug to prevent them from developing the disease. At greatest risk are babies and young children and:

- elderly people
- people with HIV infection
- people who have close contact with someone with active TB disease
- people who inject drugs
- people who are ill with other diseases that weaken the immune system

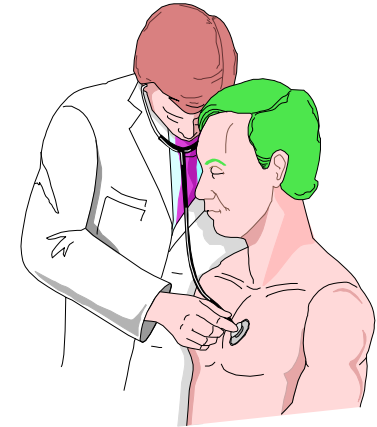
Treatment for TB Disease

TB disease can be cured by taking several drugs for 6 to 9 months. It is very important that they take the drugs exactly as prescribed. If they stop taking the drugs too soon or if they do not take the drugs correctly, the bacteria that are still alive may become resistant to those drugs. TB that is resistant to drugs is much harder to treat.

REFERENCES

Health Information, National Immunization Program, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services

TUBERCULOSIS



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If you have any questions, please contact your Regional Public Health Consultant or park sanitarian, or call WASO Public Health for more information at **202-565-1120** or see our NPS Public Health web page at **www.nps.gov/public_health/**.

